

Current Affairs - 07 August 2026

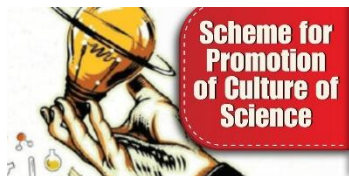
GOBARDHAN SCHEME



- The GOBARDhan (Galvanising Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan) is a National Circular Bioenergy Scheme that creates a nationwide **waste-to-energy ecosystem**.
- It aims to **increase domestic Compressed Biogas(CBG)** production nearly ten-fold, mobilize large-scale private investment and create a vibrant circular bioeconomy across the country.
- **Time Period:** It will be implemented **from FY 2026-27 to FY 2035-36**.
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- **Components of GOBARDhan Scheme:**
 - **Assured CBG Offtake:** Under this, a dedicated framework requires **City Gas Distribution** entities to meet a **notified CBG blending obligation** of 3% in FY27, 4% in FY28, and 5% from FY29 onwards in CNG and PNG segments.
 - **Stable CBG Pricing Framework:** It introduces a **stable administered CBG price** per Metric Million British Thermal Unit (MMBTU), supported through a government-backed pricing framework.
 - **Capital Assistance:** Eligible greenfield CBG projects will receive **capital assistance**.
 - **Development of Pipeline Infrastructure:** The Scheme supports both **cluster-based and standalone pipeline infrastructure** connecting CBG plants with trunk pipelines and City Gas Distribution networks.
 - **Credit Guarantee Support:** A dedicated Credit Guarantee mechanism will **strengthen lender confidence** and expand the flow of institutional credit to eligible MSME-based CBG projects.
 - **CBG Ecosystem Challenge Fund:** GOBARDhan establishes a dedicated CBG Ecosystem Challenge Fund to **accelerate district-level implementation** and strengthen local value chains across the CBG ecosystem.

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SCHEME FOR PROMOTION OF CULTURE OF SCIENCE



- It is a flagship initiative of the **Ministry of Culture, Government of India.**
- **Aim:** It is aimed at **fostering scientific temper and awareness** across the country for the public in general and students in particular also to portray the growth of science and technology and their application in industry.
- The scheme supports the **establishment of Science Cities, Science Centres, Innovation Hubs, and Digital Planetariums** in various regions.
- **Nodal Agency:** The **National Council of Science Museums (NCSM)**, an autonomous body under the Ministry of Culture, serves as the nodal agency for implementation of the scheme.
- Under this Scheme Science Centres/Digital Planetariums (Category-III) are set up in areas with a **population of less than 5 lakhs.**
- **Significance:** These institutions have significantly contributed to enhancing scientific awareness and informal science education through hands-on exhibits, innovation hubs, digital planetariums, and outreach programmes.

NATIONAL MEANS-CUM-MERIT SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME



The Department of School Education and Literacy under the Ministry of Education has invited fresh and renewal applications for the National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme (NMMSS) for the 2026-27 academic year.

- It is a **central sector Scheme.**

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- **Objective:** It was launched with the objective of awarding **scholarships to meritorious students belonging to economically weaker sections to reduce dropout at the secondary stage by encouraging them to continue their education after Class VIII.**
- NMMSS is on the **National Scholarship Portal (NSP)** – a one-stop platform for scholarship schemes given to students.
- **Features of National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme:**
 - Under the Scheme, **one lakh fresh scholarships are awarded every year to eligible students studying in Class IX, with renewal of the scholarship in Classes X to XII.**
 - **Parents Income:** Students whose parental income from all sources **is not more than Rs. 350,000/- per annum.**
 - The students must have a minimum of **55% marks or an equivalent grade in the Class VII examination (relaxable by 5% for SC/ST students).**
 - The students should be studying as regular students in a **Government, Government-aided and local body school.**
 - The students studying in the **Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS), Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS), and residential schools are not eligible for the scholarships under the NMMSS.**
 - There is reservation as per State Government norms.
 - **Selection Test:** Each State and UT conducts its own test to select students for awarding the National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship. The test is conducted at the stage of class VIII.
- **Selection of Renewal Awardees Students:**
 - The awardees should get a minimum of **60% marks in Class X for continuation of scholarship (relaxable by 5% for SC/ST candidates) in the next higher classes.**
 - For continuing the scholarship in class X and XII, the awardees should get a clear promotion from class IX to class X and from class XI to class XII in the first attempt.

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AGNI-4 MISSILE



Recently, Agni-4' was successfully test-fired from the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur in Odisha.

- It is an indigenously developed **Medium-Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM)**.
- It is developed by the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)**.
- It is operated by the **Strategic Forces Command (SFC)** as part of India's strategic missile arsenal.

Key features of Agni-4 Missile:

- **Range:** It is capable of striking targets at a **range of up to 4,000 kilometres**.
- **Propulsion:** It is a **two-stage**, surface-to-surface ballistic missile powered by a **solid-fuel rocket motor**.
- **Launch Platform:** Road-mobile launcher
- **Payload Capacity:** It has a payload capacity **up to 1,000 kg**

Technology: It has the most accurate **Ring Laser Gyro based Inertial Navigation System (RINS)** supported by a highly reliable redundant **Micro Navigation System (MINGS)**, ensures the vehicle reaches the target within two digit accuracy.

It has a **circular error probable (CEP)** of less **than 100 meters**.

- CEP is a measure of a weapon system's accuracy.

Role: It is designed to deliver strategic payloads and maintain **credible deterrence**.

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RDI FUND - INDIA'S RS. 1 LAKH CRORE DEEP-TECH FINANCING INITIATIVE

- RDI Fund is a flagship initiative of the Government of India aimed at strengthening the country's deep-tech ecosystem through long-term, affordable financing.
- Announced in 2025, the fund has a corpus of Rs. 1 lakh crore and seeks to bridge the financing gap faced by Indian technology companies developing cutting-edge innovations.
- Unlike conventional bank lending, the RDI Fund provides collateral-free, low-interest, long-tenure loans to private sector entities engaged in research and innovation.
- **Objectives**
 - Promote indigenous research and innovation.
 - Support the commercialisation of advanced technologies.
 - Reduce dependence on imported critical technologies.
 - Strengthen India's deep-tech ecosystem.
 - Encourage private sector investment in research and development.
 - Accelerate the transition from laboratory research to market-ready products.
- **Priority Sectors**
 - Artificial Intelligence (AI)
 - Quantum technologies
 - Space technologies
 - Defence technologies
 - Robotics
 - Semiconductors
 - Clean energy
 - Digital healthcare

Institutional Framework

- The RDI Fund is administered through a multi-tier institutional mechanism.
- **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF)**

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- The fund is housed under the ANRF, a statutory body established under the Ministry of Science and Technology. The ANRF has been created to:
 - Promote scientific research.
 - Strengthen university-based research.
 - Mobilise additional resources for R&D.
 - Foster industry-academia collaboration.
- A Special Purpose Fund (SPF) has been created within the ANRF to serve as the custodian of the RDI Fund.
- **Second-Level Fund Managers (SLFMs)** - Instead of directly financing companies, the ANRF channels funds through SLFMs.
- The Government intends to empanel additional organisations, including private sector entities, as SLFMs in the future.

Concerns Regarding Transparency

- The recent investigation has raised questions regarding governance and conflict of interest.
- It found that 15 out of the 22 companies selected in the first funding round reportedly have investment relationships with seven members of the Investment Committee.
- Although no violation of the existing rules has been established, the findings have triggered a debate on whether additional safeguards are necessary when allocating public funds.
- **Suggested Safeguards**
 - Inclusion of scientists and academicians from institutions such as the IITs and **Indian Institute of Science (IISc)** in Investment Committees.
 - Independent external assessment of project valuation and funding requirements.
 - Mandatory public disclosure of conflict-of-interest declarations by committee members.
 - Greater transparency regarding evaluation criteria and selection decisions.

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INDIA'S PROPOSED UPI TRANSACTION LEVY

The Finance Ministry has introduced the Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, in Parliament, proposing changes to **Section 10A of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007**.

This would allow banks and payment system providers to **charge fees on UPI and RuPay debit card transactions**, which have so far been free.

The move comes even as India and the US work to finalise a trade deal — raising questions about a possible American trade angle behind the change.

What the Bill Proposes?

- Amends the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 to enable a **Merchant Discount Rate (MDR)** on UPI transactions.
 - MDR is a fee charged to merchants by banks for processing digital payments, covering infrastructure, settlement, and security costs.
- The proposed structure: an MDR of 0.3% to 0.5%, applicable only on transactions above ₹2,000, and only for larger merchants crossing a turnover threshold.
- Small shopkeepers and everyday consumer-to-consumer transfers would remain untouched — this is a **fee on merchants**, not a direct "UPI tax" on users.
- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman clarified that MDR applies only to merchants, not end users, and that the matter is not yet finalised, pending passage of the Bill.

Why UPI Currently Has No Charges?

- Since January 2020, banks have been barred from charging merchants MDR on UPI transactions. The government instead compensates banks and payment firms through subsidies.
- However, as UPI transaction volumes have **exploded** — running into billions of transactions worth lakhs of crores monthly — these **subsidies have not kept pace** with the actual cost of running the network (servers, fraud checks, settlement infrastructure).

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- This has revived the debate on reintroducing MDR. RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra, responding to questions after the repo rate announcement, said it was too early to confirm consumer charges but noted that "**costs have to be paid by someone**" — the government, merchants, or eventually customers.

HIMALAYAN SEROW



Recently, Himalayan serow has been recorded in the Dalhousie forest division of Himachal Pradesh for the first time in nearly two decades.

- It resembles a cross between a **goat, a donkey, a cow, and a pig**.
- It is a **forest-dwelling mountain ungulate** found in steep Himalayan terrain.
- **Types:** There are several species of serows, and all of them are found in Asia.

Habitat: The Himalayan serow, or *Capricornis sumatraensis thar*, is restricted to the Himalayan region. Taxonomically, it is a subspecies of the mainland serow (*Capricornis sumatraensis*).

Distribution: They are known to be found in eastern, central, and western Himalayas.

Diet: These are **herbivore species**.

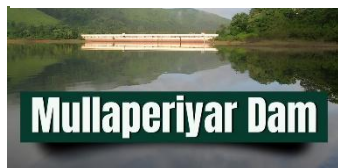
Threats: Habitat degradation, Fragmentation and hunting pressure.

Conservation Status:

- **IUCN Red List:** Near Threatened
- **CITES:** Appendix I
- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** Schedule I

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KEY FACTS ABOUT MULLAPERIYAR DAM



- It is a **masonry gravity dam** located in Thekkady, Idukki district, **Kerala**.

- The dam is built at the **confluence of the Mullayar and Periyar** (longest river in Kerala) rivers.
- It is **one of the oldest** dams in India.
- The dam's primary function is to **transfer water from the Periyar River to the Vaigai River basin in Tamil Nadu** for irrigation and power generation purposes.
 - The water from the reservoir reaches the Theni, Madurai, Sivaganga, and Ramanathapuram districts of Tamil Nadu **through tunnels** that cut **across the Western Ghats**.
 - The dam also **generates electricity for Tamil Nadu** through four hydroelectric power plants: Lower Periyar, Periyar Dam, Periyar Power House, and Vaigai.
- The dam was **constructed with limestone and "Surkhi"** (burnt brick powder and a mixture of sugar and calcium oxide).
- It is **surrounded by the Periyar National Park**, a renowned biodiversity hotspot that is home to numerous endangered species of animals and birds.
- Although the **dam is located in Kerala**, it is **operated and maintained by Tamil Nadu**.
 - It was according to a **999-year lease agreement made during British rule** that the operational rights were handed over to Tamil Nadu.
- In recent years, there has been a **long-standing dispute between Kerala and Tamil Nadu over the safety** of the dam.
 - **Kerala** has been **demanding** that the **dam be strengthened or decommissioned**, while Tamil Nadu has opposed any such move.